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A Note on the birds of the Maldive Islands

by R. S. R. Fitter

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The literature on the birds of the Maldive Islands (Indian Ocean, between c. 8°N and c. 1°S) is so sparse (Duncan 1973, Gadow & Gardiner 1903, Phillips & Sim 1958, Strickland & Jenner 1978, Watson *et al.* 1963) that the results of even so short a stay as one week on a single island may be worth recording. My wife and I visited Villingili, an island of some 200 acres, at the south end of the North Male atoll, very largely devoted to tourism, from 6-13 February 1981. The vegetation consists almost entirely of coconut palms, with associated scrub and pan-tropical weeds, and a fringe of mangroves on the open shore. Approximately half the island's coastline is unspoiled sandy beach or coral rock, the rest being occupied by a tourist facility. A coral reef surrounds the whole island.

In general we were struck by the extraordinary lack of sea and shore birds, both on and off shore. Passerines were also virtually absent. Had there been any freshwater marsh or brackish lagoon, the list of waders would doubtless have been much longer.

Mammals present were Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, presumably escaped domesticated forms as some were black, and one small unidentified rodent. Three species of reptile were frequent: the agamid lizard *Calotes versicolor*, the smaller skink *Riopa albopunctata* and indoors the gecko *Hemidactylus frenatus*. Two species of butterfly, a few small moths, a dragonfly, a large black bee with a yellow patch and sundry mosquitoes, muscids and other Diptera were also noted.

Twelve species of bird were definitely identified:-

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*. Up to 7 constantly on shore and reefs or flying over.

Small Green Heron *Butorides striatus*. 1-2 seen frequently on reefs.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*. At least 3 present inland.

Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*. One overhead 13 Feb., identified as a probable bird of the year by the characteristic tail pattern with fine cross bars between the main broad bars.

Domestic Fowl *Gallus gallus*. Appeared to be established ferally; a brood of young seen well away from the settlement.

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*. One twice seen well inland. Phillips & Sim (1958) noted that some had become entirely terrestrial.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*. One on 12 Feb.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*. Common all over the island, frequently feeding on sandy tracks inland as well as on the shore.

Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus*. One seen frequently.

Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*. At least 3 pairs present. House Crows *Corvus splendens* were exterminated some 10 years previously, so that how the Koels are maintaining themselves is something of a mystery.

European Swallow *Hirundo rustica*. Small parties seen twice.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*. One seen several times.

In addition, a single tern, probably *Sterna sumatrana*, was seen twice and on 8 Feb. Mrs. M. S. Fitter briefly saw a bird which could have been a Bronzewing pigeon *Chalcophaps indica* (blue on head and nape clearly seen), but unfortunately the bird was not seen again.

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Relationships between hermit hummingbirds and their food plants in eastern Ecuador

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Hermit hummingbirds, which forage mainly at low levels in forest, provide some striking examples of co-evolution between humming birds and the flowers from which they take nectar. Their feeding ecology has been studied in Trinidad (Snow & Snow 1972, Snow 1973), the Kanaku Mountains of Guyana (Snow 1973), and Costa Rica (Stiles 1975, Snow 1977, Stiles & Wolf 1979). The present paper gives the results of observations made in one of the richest neotropical forest areas, the eastern foothills of the Andes, and discusses the co-evolutionary relationships between this group of hummingbirds and their food-plants.